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Follow-up to and celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 59/147 of 20 December 2004. The resolution, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its sixtieth session on the implementation of the provisions contained therein. On that basis, the Secretariat prepared a note verbale, dated 6 April 2005, which was sent to all Member States. The report also takes into consideration General Assembly resolution 59/111 of 6 December, which also addressed the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The present report provides additional information regarding the follow-up to the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, paying particular attention to the information on actions and experiences concerning family issues provided by Member States.

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I. Introduction

1. After several years of preparation at the national, regional and international levels, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family was observed and celebrated at many different times and in many different places throughout the year 2004. Owing to the importance of the issue of the family to Member States, the United Nations and civil society organizations, celebratory events to observe the tenth anniversary continued to take place well into 2005. Family issues and the desire to strengthen the recognized and crucial role of the family as the basic unit of society, continue to be given priority in countries all over the world.

2. The present report was prepared as a follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and in response to resolution 59/147 of 20 December 2004, entitled "Celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond", in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the same resolution at its sixtieth session. The report also takes into consideration resolution 59/111 of 6 December 2004, adopted during the plenary meeting marking the observance of the tenth anniversary.

3. The Secretariat addressed to all Member States a note verbale, dated 6 April 2005, seeking information regarding effective policies and strategies for families, as well as on activities organized in connection with the tenth anniversary. As of 20 July 2005, a total of 26 responses to the note verbale had been received from Governments. Responses were received from Armenia, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Denmark, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Senegal, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the United States of America and Viet Nam. The responses form the basis for much of the present report. The information received was extensive and too voluminous to include in its entirety. The report, therefore, provides both a synopsis and a synthesis of recent actions taken by the Governments that responded.

4. The report also provides a brief summary of information on the types of activities undertaken in observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and on the approaches taken in family policy and in support of families, primarily at the national level. In particular, it considers actions in areas of particular interest, including the need for political will and commitment, national coordination mechanisms, legal reforms, data collection and research, improved social service provision to families and the detection and prevention of family violence. After a brief review of the activities of the United Nations programme on the family, the report suggests areas for future consideration.

5. The General Assembly also noted that follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family would form an integral part of the agenda and multi-year programme of work of the Commission for Social Development until 2006. The present report should, therefore, be considered a contribution to any further work of the Commission for Social Development regarding family issues.

II. Observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004

6. A number of meetings and conferences were held at the regional and international levels in observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, culminating in the special plenary meeting of the General Assembly on 6 December 2004. Among the many initiatives taken were the tenth international seminar, "Civil Society Organizations Networking, Interactive-Internet-Forums", organized by the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, Vienna, 6-7 May 2004; the conference on "Families, Change and Social Policy in Europe" organized by the Government of Ireland, Dublin, 13-15 May 2004; a regional conference on the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, Cotonou, Benin, 27-28 July 2004; the Doha International Conference for the Family, Doha, 29-30 November 2004; and the World Family Summit, organized by the World Family Organization in Sanya, China, 6-9 December, 2004.

7. The main focus of activities for the observance of the anniversary, however, was at the national and local levels. Countries celebrated the tenth anniversary throughout 2004 with a wide range of events and activities. High-profile political observances sometimes included the issuance of a proclamation on the family and the tenth anniversary, signed by the president of the country. Other observances involved a central event organized in parliament. The observance of the International Day of Families on 15 May provided the impetus for a number of activities. In a few countries, a national family day was designated, and in one country a family week was declared.

8. In many countries, the Head of State or Government established national coordination mechanisms to prepare for the tenth anniversary. Mechanisms were often created at the senior Government level and sometimes involved several national ministries under the leading role of the authority concerned with family matters. Many involved the active participation of non-governmental organizations, research institutions and the academic community, the private sector and the media. The national mechanisms were charged with creating and implementing a national plan for observing the tenth anniversary, raising public awareness of family issues, promoting appreciation of the role of families and identifying priority issues for concrete action and follow-up.

9. A great many activities at the national and local levels focused on increasing public awareness of important family issues and the contributions made by families. The media proved to be particularly engaged, through the organization of press conferences; the production of publications, brochures and posters; the issuance of special postage stamps; and the creation of Internet sites. Many countries organized conferences, seminars or workshops, which included Government officials and representatives from non-governmental organizations and the general public, to create awareness and discuss issues of particular national importance. Analytical studies and publications addressed questions regarding family conditions or particular issues pertaining to family policy.

III. Action taken at the national level concerning family issues

10. In its resolution 59/147, the General Assembly urged Governments to continue to take sustained action at all levels concerning family issues, including applied studies and research, in order to promote the role of families in development and to develop concrete measures and approaches to address national priorities in dealing with family issues.

11. Governments continue to recognize the importance of family as the basic unit of society, and the crucially important role families have in promoting and maintaining social and economic well-being. Governments, communities and individuals look to families as the primary means for people to live together and to provide mutual care, nurturing and support. As a result of those expectations, despite the present environment in which families have been undergoing tremendous and rapid changes, Governments have given increased emphasis to strengthening and empowering families.

A. Political will and commitment

12. An important conclusion of the International Year of the Family, which was reiterated during the observance of its tenth anniversary, is that the need remains for political will and commitment in acknowledging the important role of the family and to strengthening families through the development of coherent and effective family policies. Acknowledgement may take the form of presidential statements or declarations on the family as in, for example, those of the Philippines and the United States, which show political commitment, outline policy initiatives for the family and also raise awareness.

13. Acknowledgement can also take the form of a reorganization of a ministry or ministries to give greater emphasis to family issues, as in the case of Denmark, which established the new Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs. Other countries opened new offices concerned with family policy issues within an existing ministry. For example, Peru established an office on the family and community within the Ministry of Women and Social Development. Jordan established the National Council for Family Affairs, which has been given the task of formulating and implementing policies and plans related to the family and which will follow up, together with all concerned parties, on the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children 2003-2014. The Syrian Arab Republic recently created the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs to improve the family's ability to participate in human development efforts.

14. Countries may also show commitment through the adoption and enactment of a State family policy, plan of action or family development programme. Some countries that have recently adopted or updated State policies include Armenia, Latvia, Malaysia, Maldives, Peru, and the Philippines.

B. National coordination

15. A general conclusion from the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is that there is a need for more comprehensive approaches to family policymaking that harmonize and coordinate the actions of

different Government ministries on behalf of the family. Since family issues and concerns are multisectoral and often cannot be addressed by a single ministry, it is important that a national coordination mechanism have the mandate and capacity to engage the various stakeholders, both within and outside Government, in intersectoral consultation and coordination.

16. Policy harmonization and political will can come together through the adoption of a multisectoral State family policy, plan of action or programme in which implementation is spearheaded by a national coordinating mechanism. Burkina Faso plans in the medium-to-long term to develop and implement a national plan of action for promotion of the family, and has already established a national committee for that purpose. New Zealand established, in 2004, the Families Commission, a new Government-funded Crown entity acting as a dedicated advocate for the interests of New Zealand families. South Africa is engaged in finalizing an intersectoral national family policy to strengthen and preserve families, facilitate integrated service delivery to families at all levels of Government and facilitate the provision and distribution of adequate resources between stakeholders for families and communities.

17. Mexico has developed the National System for the Integral Development of the Family; the Ministry of Social Development of the Sultanate of Oman has created coordinating mechanisms for family affairs; and Qatar has initiated the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, which addresses family issues as an inseparable part of the entire range of social issues. Peru and the Philippines have multisectoral committees or commissions to implement national plans of action and provide support; Portugal has established the National Coordinator for Family Affairs and is defining and implementing a global and integrated policy for family affairs.

C. Legal reforms

18. Taking concrete measures, including updating and reforming the legal framework governing families and family law, is another means to address family issues. A number of countries have reviewed their constitutions and legal systems regarding issues relating to families, children, adolescents and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities. Legal reforms or the adoption of a family legal code can provide legal protection to families and their children.

19. Countries that are undertaking or have undertaken reforms in family law include Armenia, which has a new family code that includes a special section devoted to the problems of children deprived of parental custody and that sets forth in detail the legal basis for adoption; Burkina Faso, which is conducting a review of legal instruments with regard to social and family protection; Hungary, whose refinements of the legal framework to ensure further support to families now also include a prohibition of corporal punishment; Maldives, which revised its family law pertaining to divorce and is conducting impact analysis research; and Viet Nam, which is developing and amending its family-based legal system and policies to form a favourable legal framework for the healthy and sustainable development of families.

D. Data collection and research

20. Governments report that there is a continuing need for data collection and in-depth research on the family and its functions, relationships and dynamics. One method is to conduct national family surveys on a regular basis. The research would help to raise awareness of family issues and the information obtained would inform and support adjustments to existing policies as well as new policy development.

21. Several countries are conducting research in the area of the family. The Government of Bolivia is working with the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme to construct an index of human development with a focus on children and families. In Italy, the national observatory on the family monitors socio-demographic indicators and analyses changes in family structure. It also analyses, selects and disseminates best practices developed at the local level. To collect relevant data, in 2004 Malaysia conducted the Fourth Malaysia Population and Family Survey. Findings of research on the family are published in the *Malaysian Journal of Family Studies*. Qatar carried out several family-related data collection surveys, such as family budget surveys, the family and child health survey, and other studies on the impact of nannies on children and social education.

22. In Mexico, the National System for the Integral Development of the Family organizes and conducts research activities to support the design of public policies with a family perspective. The office conducted, from 2003-2005, an analysis of the Mexican family, which included identifying the composition and structure of Mexican families and collecting the opinions, attitudes and values of people of different generations to obtain a comprehensive description of the Mexican family in its various dimensions for use in policy formulation.

E. Social service provision

23. Social services, such as education, health care, social welfare services and labour-market services, are vitally important to promote the well-being of families. Improvements to the quality of social services and to the way they are provided is another way in which national Governments can have a positive impact on families. Some countries have either reformed or expanded their provision of social services. Hungary increased benefits for parents of children with disabilities or for those whose children are ill; Latvia increased social child allowances; New Zealand improved financial support for parents and their children, including income assistance, housing support and childcare assistance; Pakistan expanded access to health care coverage, especially mother and child health care; the United States worked to reform education policies, including early childhood education, and continued to reform income assistance programmes; and Oman established a family guidance and advisory department offering counselling, awareness-raising and prevention services to address numerous social and psychological problems.

24. In Qatar, the Department of Social Affairs endeavours to maintain the coherence of the family and to prevent its disintegration through the implementation of programmes and plans focusing on low-income social groups as well as on older persons, orphans, divorced women and abandoned wives, and the families of prison inmates.

25. In some countries, however, the provision of social services poses extreme challenges owing to the large number of families living in poverty. This is particularly the case in many developing countries. Senegal commemorated the International Day of Families in 2004 around the theme "Family and poverty", discussing and addressing ways to decrease poverty among families but also highlighting the challenges that exist when approximately 50 per cent of urban families and nearly 75 per cent of rural families are living in poverty. Burkina Faso used the opportunity provided by the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family to draw the attention of its citizens to the vital role the family plays in fighting the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and in preventing its transmission from mothers to children.

26. Indonesia is also combating poverty among families. According to a census by the Ministry of Social Affairs, there are 9 million family units — constituting close to 37 million people — living in poverty. The Government of Indonesia is responding by taking measures to promote poverty eradication and democracy using a people-centred approach.

F. Detecting and preventing intrafamily violence

27. Governments recognize that domestic violence of any sort, but particularly violence against women and girls, is a social problem, a threat to family stability and cohesion and a violation of human dignity. Burkina Faso intends to conduct a study on family violence, with an emphasis on forced marriages. Colombia began a process in 2004 to develop, design and validate models to prevent violence, in the context of education and mobilization to promote family harmony. The effort also included a model to provide attention to victims of sexual violence, as it was observed that sexual violence could be a component of intra-family violence.

28. Maldives established a multisectoral support system for victims of domestic violence; Pakistan set up crisis centres in several cities, with a view to expanding them over time, to protect women against violence of all kinds and to provide women with legal and other assistance in redressing grievances relating to discrimination; and the Syrian Arab Republic drafted, with the participation of committees from Government authorities and non-governmental organizations, national strategies for the protection of the family, including the protection of women and children from violence.

G. Other related actions and issues

29. Actions taken with regard to other issues related to families include improving the conditions and status of women in Pakistan; developing programmes to promote responsible fatherhood in the United States; improving Government services and social support in the Philippines to protect nationals living and working abroad; pursuing and enacting policies in Denmark, such as more flexible maternity leave and a wider range of choice with respect to day care, to assist families to achieve a healthy balance between work and family life; and developing, in several countries, comprehensive programmes to assist single-parent families.

IV. Follow-up by the United Nations programme on the family

30. The General Assembly, in its resolution 59/147, invited the Secretary-General, within existing resources, to disseminate, by the time of the holding of the forty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development, a compilation of existing development cooperation activities of the United Nations system in the area of the family. The purpose of the compilation is to provide information on existing activities in the field of the family for the benefit of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, other relevant United Nations bodies, Member States and observers. The resolution also encouraged greater cooperation among United Nations system organizations, programmes and agencies on issues relating to the family; encouraged the regional commissions of the United Nations, within existing resources, to promote further the exchange of experiences at the regional level; and emphasized that the Secretariat should continue its role in the programme of work on family issues, including continuing to cooperate with the United Nations system, among others, in strengthening national capacities through the implementation of the mandated objectives of the International Year of the Family.

31. The desire for greater cooperation is also reflected in General Assembly resolution 59/111, which, inter alia, encouraged United Nations agencies and bodies, including the regional commissions, to work closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in a coordinated manner on family-related issues.

32. In response to that invitation, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs initiated written correspondence with the executive secretaries of the United Nations regional commissions and with the heads of relevant United Nations programmes, funds, specialized agencies, research and training institutes and other United Nations entities. The correspondence requests all relevant information and further requests the name and contact information of the persons responsible for family activities in the respective United Nations entities, for the purpose of strengthening communications and sharing information. Thus, the process of assembling the compilation document has begun. Plans call for its issuance at the forty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development in February 2006.

33. In addition, the United Nations programme on the family within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has undertaken or supported a range of activities for the observance of, and follow-up to, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The activities include the following:

(a) A panel discussion to observe the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, organized jointly with the New York NGO Committee on the Family. The panel was held during the afternoon of 6 December 2004 following the plenary meeting devoted to the observance of the tenth anniversary at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. The panel consisted of representatives from Governments, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization and civil society;

(b) Observance of the International Day of Families (15 May). The day was observed at United Nations Headquarters on 12 May 2005 under the theme "HIV/AIDS and family well-being". The observance, organized jointly with the Department of Public Information, included a video presentation and seminar on the

theme. Speakers included representatives from Governments, the United Nations system and civil society;

(c) A seminar entitled "Fathers and Family Health", organized with the NGO Committee on Health. The seminar included presentations by an academic expert who has organized participatory studies on fatherhood involving fathers from immigrant communities in New York and by a social worker who works with fathers and children through a New York City public school health programme;

(d) A study of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family, entitled "AIDS and the family: policy options for a crisis in family capital", has been updated, revised and edited. It will be published and disseminated during the second half of 2005;

(e) Participation and representation at conferences and meetings organized by Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. Representation in 2005 has included participation in international conferences in Rome, Italy; Murcia, Spain; and Provo, Utah, United States;

(f) The United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities provided support for the panel discussion organized on 6 December 2004 in conjunction with the plenary of the General Assembly devoted to the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The Fund will also contribute to the publication of the study of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family.

34. The preceding activities have provided and will continue to provide opportunities for Government representatives and representatives of non-governmental organizations, experts and other interested actors to exchange information, experiences and good practices, which can prove instrumental in the formulation and implementation of family policies, programmes and activities.

V. Suggestions and recommendations

35. The present report highlights some recent national actions to strengthen and improve the well-being of families and presents some recent activities of the United Nations programme on the family. In considering follow-up action to the tenth anniversary, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:

1. A number of Governments established or revitalized coordination mechanisms to prepare the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. **The General Assembly may wish to invite Governments to maintain those mechanisms and to continue to utilize them to coordinate policies and activities.**

2. International cooperation can help countries to build national capacity to develop and implement policies that respond to the situation and challenges facing families. To facilitate cooperation within the United Nations system in strengthening national capacities, **the General Assembly could encourage the programmes, funds and specialized agencies to consider how they could integrate a family perspective into their activities and to identify a focal point on family matters within their offices. The Assembly could further request the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to build upon the current initiative to disseminate**

a compilation of existing development cooperation activities of the United Nations system to strengthen cooperation in the area of the family.

3. Acknowledging the need for additional capacity-building at the national level to promote and facilitate the development and implementation of family policies, **the General Assembly could encourage Governments to support the United Nations Family Trust Fund to enable the Department to provide expanded assistance to countries, upon their request.**

4. Recognizing the continuing need for data and in-depth research on the family and its functions, relationships and dynamics, and building on the experience of some countries that have undertaken family diagnostic studies and surveys, **the General Assembly could recommend that Governments encourage research activities that provide input for public policies with a family perspective, utilizing participatory methodologies and techniques to elaborate the priority issues and needs of families, to identify the structures and composition of families and to collect opinions, attitudes and values of people of different generations. The Assembly may also wish to recommend that the research activities of Governments be supplemented with research and publications on relevant topics conducted and supported by the United Nations programme on the family.**

5. **The General Assembly may wish to consider requesting that future reports of the Secretary-General on the issue of the family focus thematically on one or more issues affecting families and family policies and provide for the exchange of information, experiences and good practices in implementing those policies. The report could provide analysis on how Governments and public policy can best address the particular problems.**